



297. Oct. 14/27, 1980B Elder Nazarius of Sarov

Categories : [Letters](#)

Date : October 10, 2016

Dear Father Demetrios,

Christ is in our midst!

I have just written Fr. Photios, declining the invitation to speak at the 1981 Conference, I know that this will be a disappointment to you, but I hope that you will be able to understand my feelings and will not judge me.

Officially, I am declining because I will be too busy next summer. This is certainly true, because I have been committed for a long time to give a talk at the Russian Conference of our Church in San Francisco in July, and the preparations for my talk and course at our own summer St. Herman Pilgrimage always take me much time also.

But just between us, I would like to say something more: I believe you had hopes that the Pennsylvania Conference could be an opportunity for reconciling the differences between our Greek- Americans and those of us who are increasingly disturbed and offended by their actions and statements. I would love to be able to help in such a reconciliation, but I am powerless: I could go to the Conference, be polite to Fr. Panteleimon and his followers (or even express my opinion frankly to him in private—it would make no difference), and leave with absolutely nothing changed. Whatever the present “disagreement” might be (for example, the question of Fr. Dimitry Dudko), the underlying causes are much deeper.

These causes, as I see it, are two (or rather, one cause with two sides): (1) A deep distrust on the part of our Greek-Americans in the Orthodoxy of our Russian Church Abroad—both the Orthodoxy of our present-day bishops and theologians, and the whole Orthodox tradition of which they are the inheritors; and (2) the formation of a clique, centering around Fr. Panteleimon, of Greeks and Americans (and a very few Russians under their influence) who think they “know better” than our Russian Church what Orthodoxy is, and are determined to make their “superior knowledge” prevail in our Church or else leave it as “apostate.”

The answer to this situation, I believe, can only be one: Fr. Panteleimon and his followers must really and deeply begin to trust themselves less and the Russian Church more. If and when they can do this, the disagreements in the Church which have been caused by their attitude will disappear almost by themselves.

I personally feel that one of the present disagreements which has been caused by their attitude



(the disagreement over Fr. Dimitry Dudko) is of such a magnitude that my participating in the Conference, knowing that public prayer for Fr. Dimitry and his fellow sufferers in the Moscow Patriarchate (whom Bishop Gregory calls “our brothers in one and the same Church”) could not be offered publicly, and open support for and defense of them could not be given (as long as Fr. Panteleimon is there)—would be a betrayal of Orthodoxy on my part. I would be turning my back on my suffering Orthodox brothers and telling others not to pray for them, while justifying the pharisaic “correctness” that is spreading like a disease among us. And this is only one of the many disagreements that will be occurring in the months ahead as Fr. Panteleimon and his followers try to impose their idea of Orthodoxy on the rest of us.

The presence of Deacon Lev Puhalo as a speaker at the Conference would be another reason why I would wish not to attend, so as not to support in any way either his publicly-proclaimed errors, his attempt to “modernize” and “renovate” our Orthodoxy, or his crude disrespect towards the Orthodox tradition which has come down to us—all with the approval of Fr. Panteleimon and other Greek- Americans.

Theoretically, some of the present “disagreements” in the Church could be removed by a public apology and disavowal of their statements by Deacon Lev, Fr. Nektas Palassis, and Fr. Panteleimon. I would be very surprised but encouraged to see such statements, but I wonder if even this would touch the underlying problem? Nevertheless, let us see such disavowals and then we can hope for reconciliation. Until then, I hope you will be patient and understanding if some of us stay far away from what is happening.

I look with pain and sadness on this whole situation, which I have tried to describe as I see it; but as I have said, I am powerless to do anything about it. I could be persuaded to be as friendly as you like with Fr. Panteleimon or anyone else, but it would not change anything. Our Brotherhood was extremely friendly to Fr. Panteleimon and all our Greek-Americans even from before the day they entered our Church, and when we saw the emerging “disagreements” eight years ago we tried our best to make them see the “other side.” The result was only, at first, a total silence and evident unwillingness to listen, and finally, a “stab in the back” for a reward of our long support of them. The inevitable schism which they are now preparing (if they don’t change soon) will be the last step in a process which only they can change.

Please forgive me if I seem discouraging or pessimistic, and also please don’t think that I judge you in your own position, especially with regard to the Conference, where of course you must take into consideration all different points of view and not go “against the current.” I certainly believe you are one of those who will be faithful to our Russian Church Abroad when and if (God forbid!) our Greek-Americans create their schism, and I also believe that there will be more priests faithful to our Church than some may think would be the case. May God preserve us all in these difficult times! (But really, it was no better in ancient times!)

To return to the Conference: I see with sadness that it was unrealistic of me to hope that it could be



“above parties and politics” and would be representative of the whole of our Church and not just the loudest English-language clique. But still, do you really have to be silent about the suffering Russian Church, of which, after all, we are a part? The struggle of Fr. Dimitry, Fr. Gleb Yakunin, and their fellow-strugglers, strikes such a responsive chord in all of us who are not being “jammed” by Fr. Panteleimon’s opinions, that the 1981 Conference will seem pale and academic without active interest and support shown for it. Fr. Victor Potapov, I am sure, would be glad to speak on this subject—but if Fr. Panteleimon is going to criticize and “correct” and neutralize his talk, then of course it would be pointless. Must so much of our Church be under the dictatorship of one man and his clique, who are becoming more and more out of contact with the best of living Orthodoxy today?;

The starving, suffering Orthodox in Uganda (see the next Orthodox Word and Orthodox America) would be another natural subject for the Conference to be concerned about, if it is to be more than academic. But I somehow think even this would be a “forbidden” subject, since they are “new calendarists.” One of our priests under Fr. Panteleimon’s influence wrote us after one of our appeals for them, doubting that he should send them money for clothes, because their Orthodoxy might not be “pure.” How can we combat this cold-hearted elitism?

Please forgive me if I have been too frank or too pessimistic. Actually, deep down I do hope that we will “suffer through” this whole problem and that the deeper heart of our Church will make itself known in the end.

Please continue to remember our Brotherhood in your prayers, as we remember you. I will be glad to hear your comments. I told Fr. Photios that we would be glad to send information and photos of our monastery for a display, and also our publications—just tell us what to send.

With love in Christ,

P.s. I am trusting you that a copy of this letter will not go into Fr. Panteleimon’s “files”! These “files” smell like “KGB” to many of us!